

Appendix 5 - Recycling Behaviour Change Campaign

Background

Contamination (non-recyclable items) found in the mixed recycling stream has been a long-standing issue for Brent. High levels of contamination results in rejected loads of recycling at the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) which is then disposed of as refuse at a cost. This is not good for the environment as it means more waste being incinerated, rather than being recycled. It also adds to the carbon footprint as the rejected load then gets transported to be treated as refuse.

In the new contract with Veolia, we agreed to a twin stream fibre recycling collection from kerbside properties in order to address the high level of contamination in our recycled waste. This change came into effect on 1 October 2023. Residents who live in a kerbside property with a recycling bin are asked to separate their paper and cardboard from the rest of their recycled waste and put it into their new blue sack. The paper and cardboard now go to a paper and card off taker (Edwards) and the mixed recycling is processed by N+P Material Recovery Facility.

The tolerance level for contamination in the paper and card stream is 5% and below. Since the service change in October until now, we have not seen any rejected material due to contamination levels being higher than the 5% tolerance level, resulting in all material being recycled and rebated. In contrast, the tolerance level at N+P MRF (where mixed recycling is processed) is 15% and above and we see rejected loads at above 15% contamination on a weekly basis.

At the start of service change in October, lower tonnages were recorded for Dry Mixed Recycling at the N+P MRF. This was mainly due to removal of paper and card from the mixed recycling stream and separation of communal rounds. It was noted that the recycling collected from communal rounds was highly contaminated and therefore needed to be treated as refuse. The data received from N+P during the initial months of service change showed an increase in percentage of highly contaminated rejected loads at the MRF (October-December an average of 55%). However, we have seen a decrease in rejected loads in January and February (an average of 28%) with the service change embedding for residents and Veolia collection crews.

The average level of contamination from sampled accepted loads each month is 26%. This is totalling both objectionable items (such as plastic bags, hard plastic) and prohibited items (such as food waste, nappies, textiles).

Understanding why residents contaminate

Research shows that the most common contaminants are Food waste; Nappies- used and new; Textiles; Garden waste; Electrical items and Black bags. There are several reasons why people might contaminate their bins, including:

- Recycling is confusing, packaging symbols can be misleading; some items say they are recyclable, but we cannot recycle them

- Over recyclers/wishful recyclers – residents who are green-minded but do not know what goes in the right bin will default to the recycling bin hoping that it can be recycled as they believe it is better for the environment
- There might not be enough space in the refuse bins, so residents just put it in their recycling bins
- Some residents do not care to recycle and use the bin the same as a general waste bin
- In households of multiple occupancy, bins are shared, therefore, there is no ownership over the use of the bins which can and does lead to contamination issues.

Objective and outcomes we are trying to achieve

Service Objectives	Outcomes
Decrease the average rate of contamination by 3% from 23/24 to 24/25.	Build an understanding of what can and cannot be put in various recycling collections to reduce contamination.
Decrease the amount of Household residual waste (tonnage) by 2%.	Motivate and inform residents about easy and effective ways to reduce household waste and increase following and engagement on key council digital channels to facilitate more effective and timely communications with residents.

Behaviour change plan for different audience

Audience	Segments	Engagement Type
Residents and households	Kerbside property residents, residents who live in flats or places with communal waste	Direct communications, stickers on bins, bin hangers, adverts on bin trucks, adverts on JC Decaux and social media adverts
Veolia Crew	The crew pick up the recycling and chooses which bins are contaminated	Clear communications on actions to take with contaminated bins.
New parents	Nappies are a key contaminant	Target them directly through family groups, libraries and new parent packs from the NHS.

Stakeholders to influence the success of behaviour change campaign

Audience	Segments	Engagement Type
Local Groups	Resident associations, local environmental groups, multi-faith groups	Physical & digital media, direct engagement

Councillors/Members	All elected officials	Member briefings
Partner Organisations	Veolia, BHM, WRAP, Lets Recycle, ReLondon, WLWA and neighbouring boroughs	Digital media, press releases
Council Officers	NMT, Housing, Enforcement,	Briefings, digital media, direct engagement
Media Outlets	Trade press, radio stations, news outlets.	Press releases. Media briefings.

Current communication and outreach plan in place

- Collection crews tag bins as contaminated and should not empty the bin
- Veolia spot check rounds/areas, highlight repeat offenders
- Visits are made by recycling officers to those at third contamination tag as per Power BI reports downloaded each week, with letter including pictorial information on correct recycling
- Communal contamination- in addition to literature to residents, working with managing agent/caretaker, highlighting contractual agreements whilst ensuring facilities are at a standard
- 'Ride alongs' with Veolia crew began in January 2024 with 5 'ride alongs' per month carried out by Brent recycling officers to monitor both resident and crew recycling performance.

Challenges

- Reliant on accurate crew data on the tagging
- Tagged bins should not be emptied but still high rates of contamination appear at the MRF
- Repeat visits are made to addresses that do not change behaviour
- Transient population- visits are made to the address and new tenants move in

Developments and plan for 2024/25

- Round by round contamination checks- we now have a camera on the recycling bay at Veolia which will provide data on which rounds are highly contaminated, to target with outreach and communications
- Bespoke communication plan for HMO's- working with housing to reach managing agents whilst empowering shared households to recycle correctly
- Bin lid stickers with key contaminants and QR code for further information and call to action
- Using data and reports to target hot spots
- New engaging communication assets for common contaminants.

Key communication messages

- Recycling properly is good for the planet- We are committed to becoming a carbon-neutral borough by 2030 and improving the amount and quality of recycling helps us work towards this goal
- The effects of contamination- cost to council
- The recycling processes/life cycle
- Understanding the MRF- its capabilities, what can and cannot be processed and why.

Targeted messaging per contaminant

- Nappies – cannot be recycled- why, the affects this has on good recycling.
- Green garden waste – Recycling vs non recycling processes. Sign-up for £60 and we will take it away for you
- Food waste – Recycled food is converted into energy and compost, promote food waste caddies, food waste saving tips etc.
- Textiles – use our small items collection, local charity shops, or TRAIDs pick-up option to give your clothes to someone who needs them
- Small electricals/batteries – Use our small items collections service, or battery bins found in shops and local libraries. Batteries in any bin causes fires.

Communication Channels

<i>Point of use channels</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bin hangers saying why we have not collected their bin, issued by Veolia crew • Stickers on bins with contaminants for repeat offenders • Leaflets/letters to houses that are not recycling properly
<i>Corporate channels</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free-of-charge corporate channels such as the website, e-newsletters, Members Bulletin and social media to reach highly engaged audience • Recycling/climate action engagement events • Internal Council channels – yammer, intranet, magazines etc. • Assist council colleagues in community events and provide materials to help with their outreach e.g. Neighbourhood team, Climate Emergency Team, Enforcement, Housing etc.
<i>Paid for channels</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media campaign (advert on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube) • Adverts on collection vehicles • Outdoor advertising (JC Decaux 60 sites across the borough, bus stop adverts, billboards)
<i>Other channels</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community screens • WhatsApp groups • Local Facebook groups • Next Door app • We will draw on existing networks and connections to communities within the council e.g. Disability Forum, Black Community Action Plan

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Evaluation

Communications will be trialled in key target areas and measured against levels of contamination pre and post intervention, which will then inform the wider campaign across the borough. All successes will be tracked and measured against the service objectives outlined in the objectives section of this document.